

WRITTEN SOURCES OF THE POLITICAL HISTORY OF CENTRAL ASIA IN THE ANCIENT AND EARLY MEDIEVAL PERIODS

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Annotation: This article analyzes sources and chronicles related to the history of the ancient and early medieval periods. Ancient documents and written sources concerning the history of the Uzbek people and the development of statehood are scattered across different parts of the world, and their exact number and content remain unknown. Today, one of the important tasks facing historians and specialists in source studies is to find, study, and introduce such written materials and manuscripts into scientific circulation. Written sources related to the history of Central Asia are also distinguished by the fact that many of them, compared with other historical sources, have not yet been sufficiently studied.

Keywords: Central Asia, Yenisei, Epigraphic sources, Chinese chronicles, Hephthalites, Avesta, Historical chronicles, Behistun inscriptions, Runic inscriptions, Sogdian documents.

Аннотация: В этой статье анализируются источники и летописи, относящиеся к древней и раннесредневековой истории. Древние документы и письменные источники, связанные с историей узбекского народа и государственности, разбросаны по всему миру, и их точное количество и содержание неизвестны. В настоящее время одной из важных задач для историков и источниковедов является поиск, изучение и включение в научный оборот таких письменных данных и рукописей. Письменные источники по истории Средней Азии также отличаются тем, что многие из них, в отличие от других источников, не были изучены.

Ключевые слова: Средняя Азия, Енисей, Эпиграфические источники, Китайские хроники, Эфталиты, Авестийские источники, Исторические летописи, Бехистунские надписи, Рунические надписи, Согдийские документы.

Introduction

A large number of tribes and ethnic groups lived in Central Asia. Among them were the Hephthalites, the Turkic Khaganate, the Kidarites, the Chionites, and other peoples who had their own states during the 5th–6th centuries. Another valuable source is the book Avesta, in which information about the description of Central Asia and the history of statehood in the region was recorded. Ancient epigraphic materials, Indian sources, Chinese chronicles, as well as ancient Greco-Roman sources serve as important sources on the early history of Central Asia. These sources contain valuable information about the history of Central Asia during the ancient and early medieval periods.

Main Part

Among the ancient Turkic sources, the Turkic inscriptions discovered in the 17th century in Siberia, Mongolia, the Altai region, and Central Asia are of particular importance. These inscriptions are divided into seven groups: the Lena inscriptions, the Baikal region inscriptions, the Yenisei inscriptions, the Mongolian inscriptions, the Altai inscriptions, the Eastern Turkestan inscriptions, and the Central Asian inscriptions. These monuments help in studying the socio-political and cultural life of the peoples of Central Asia on the eve of the Arab conquest[1]. In studying the early medieval history of Central Asia, both oral and written sources provide important information. These accounts were recorded by scholars, travelers, merchants, and other individuals who wrote down what they had heard, seen, and experienced.

The Yenisei inscriptions were discovered by the famous Russian cartographer S. U. Remezov (approximately 1642–1720) in the late seventeenth century in the Yenisei basin, which today belongs to the Khakass Autonomous Region. Later, information about them was provided



by the Swedish military prisoner F. Strahlenberg (Tabbert), who discovered unknown characters carved into gravestones in the Yenisei basin. Information about these inscriptions was first published in the journal *Sibirskiy Vestnik* in the early nineteenth century. In 1889, Finnish scholars compiled a map of the written monuments discovered in the Yenisei region. Among the inscriptions found in Mongolia, the monuments dedicated to Tonyukuk, Kultegin, Bilge Khagan, and Ongin occupy an important place. Inscriptions discovered in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan during the 1960s–1970s have not yet been thoroughly studied. Among them, inscriptions found in the Talas Valley (Ayritom, Teraksoy, Qulonsoy, Taldykorgan, Urjor, Syrdarya, Ili, Alma-Ata, Tolgar, Tinbas, and others) are of significant scientific importance[2].

Valuable information about the Saka, Massagetae, Tocharians, and the ancient Kangju people, as well as their socio-economic life, can also be found in the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* (“The Tale of the Bharata Dynasty”) was written in Sanskrit and consists of 18 books containing about one hundred thousand verses. It narrates the conflicts and wars between two branches of the descendants of the legendary king Bharata, the Kauravas and the Pandavas. The epic was created between the tenth and eighth centuries BCE. Sources written in the Sogdian language mainly date from the fourth to the tenth centuries and include various legal documents such as agreements, marriage contracts, sales documents, receipts, correspondence between the rulers of Sogd, Shosh, Turk, and Fergana, as well as records related to everyday economic activities, for example documents containing expense records and official decrees. These documents were discovered in Sogdiana, at the Mount Mug fortress, at Afrasiab in Samarkand, and in the territories of Kyrgyzstan and Eastern Turkestan[3]. Each type of historical source differs significantly from the others. At the same time, written sources related to the history of the Uzbek people and their statehood continue to be studied in collections around the world. Working with historical sources helps us understand what actually happened in the past and provides information about the lives of people, their customs, and their economic activities.

Along with these sources, Chinese historical sources should also be mentioned. In Chinese historiography, Sima Qian is regarded as the father of history. In his historical work, which includes historical chronicles and memoirs, various peoples living within and beyond the Chinese state are described. His famous work *Shiji* (Records of the Grand Historian) consists of 130 chapters. Some chapters of this work, particularly chapter 123, contain valuable information about Fergana and the life of the ancient peoples living there. Therefore, this work is considered an important source for studying the peoples who lived in the western regions corresponding to present-day Uzbekistan. In addition, another important historical work created in China during this period is *Han Shu* (The History of the Former Han Dynasty) written by Ban Gu (Bangu). In chapter 95 of this work, valuable information is presented about ancient peoples such as the Kangju, Yuezhi, and Wusun, who lived in the territories corresponding to present-day Uzbekistan, as well as about the ancient history and life of Eastern Turkestan[4].

It is impossible to discuss the beginnings of ancient Greek and Roman sources without mentioning Herodotus, who is known as the father of history. In the fifth century BCE, Herodotus traveled widely from the city of Halicarnassus in Asia to various regions of Europe, Asia, and Egypt. In his nine-volume historical work *Histories*, he recorded the events he observed and experienced in the territories of Greek states as well as in the lands of eastern peoples. Considering the significance of the information presented in this work and the fact that it represents one of the earliest attempts at a comprehensive historical account, Cicero referred to Herodotus as the “father of history,” a title that is widely accepted today. Although Herodotus did not always deeply analyze the events he described, he attempted to present them in a relatively objective manner. One of his notable characteristics was that he described the peoples, cultures, and traditions of different nations with respect, without excessive criticism or bias. In his historical writings, valuable information can be found about ancient peoples of Central Asia, such as the Massagetae, Saka, and other tribes, including their customs and their relations with



neighboring states. For example, the Greek historian Diodorus wrote a work titled *Bibliotheca Historica* (“Historical Library”), which consists of forty books. In this work he described eastern peoples such as the Scythians, Saka, Massagetae, and Bactrians, as well as their relations with the Achaemenid Empire of Iran. It is also evident that the author widely used the works of Ephorus and Polybius as sources. Although some parts of the narrative are not always logically connected, the work contains a wealth of historical facts. Even though it has not survived completely to the present day, it still serves as an important source that provides valuable information about the early history of the region.

The reliability of the information provided by Greek and Roman authors varies considerably. Most of this information was recorded long after the events it describes. For this reason, the accounts of ancient authors often contain inaccuracies, doubtful details, and controversial interpretations. In some cases, a single event is described in different versions. In the works of ancient authors, certain geographical terms—such as the names of rivers, mountains, cities, and settlements—are mentioned, but determining their exact locations (localization) often presents significant difficulties. Some of these locations remain the subject of scholarly debate and have not yet been clearly identified. In addition, real historical events in the works of ancient authors are sometimes mixed with mythical or semi-legendary narratives. The information provided by Greek and Roman historians about Central Asia is often fragmentary and, in many cases, not closely interconnected. Therefore, it is difficult to form a complete and coherent picture of the history of the peoples who lived in Central Asia in ancient times based solely on these sources. Nevertheless, through a critical analysis of the information provided by ancient authors and by incorporating archaeological and epigraphic evidence, it is possible to study the ancient history of the region more deeply and comprehensively[5].

Many sources about the history of Central Asia can also be found in Sogdian documents. These documents date back to the 4th–10th centuries and include various types of records such as chronicles, correspondence between rulers, and documents related to everyday administrative and economic activities. These materials were discovered in Sogdiana, particularly at the Mount Mug fortress, in the Afrasiab area of Samarkand, as well as in the territories of Kyrgyzstan and Eastern Turkestan. These documents were written or carved on materials such as leather, wooden tablets, and different types of skins.

The Orkhon–Yenisei runic inscriptions also occupy an important place in the study of the history of the Turkic peoples. The monuments dedicated to Kultegin, Bilge Khagan, and Tonyukuk contain valuable information about political struggles, systems of governance, and military campaigns during the period of the Turkic Khaganate. These inscriptions reflect not only political history but also the worldview and living conditions of the Turkic peoples[6]. These inscriptions provide a significant amount of information and sources about our region. The written traditions of the Turkic peoples, their customary practices, and the formation of tribal structures are clearly reflected in the Orkhon–Yenisei inscriptions. These monuments date back to the 8th century and are texts carved into stone during the period of the Turkic Khaganate. The Orkhon–Yenisei script consists of approximately 38–40 characters. Most of these inscriptions are funerary texts written on gravestones, describing the bravery of the deceased, their tribal affiliation, and aspects of their economic life.

In addition, the works of Arab historians are considered among the most important written sources for the history of Central Asia. Authors such as At-Tabari, Al-Baladhuri, and Al-Istakhri provided detailed information about the Arab conquest of Transoxiana, the activities of local rulers, and the development of cities. Through these works, valuable historical information can be obtained about the economic and cultural life of the regions of Samarkand, Bukhara, and Khorezm[7]. The works of Arab historians are also distinguished by the fact that they are largely based on real events and on what the authors themselves witnessed or learned from reliable



reports. In general, written sources—especially the works of Arab historians—play an important role in the study of the history of Central Asia.

In addition, the works of Greek and Byzantine authors also contain important information about the Hephthalites and Turkic tribes. The information recorded by Byzantine historians is particularly valuable for studying the political changes that took place in Central Asia during the 6th century. By comparing written sources belonging to different civilizations, it becomes possible to reconstruct the history of Central Asia more accurately[8]. The study of our history shows that many written sources, chronicles, and epigraphic materials produced from the early medieval period up to the present are related to the history of Central Asia. Therefore, translating and analyzing these works makes it possible to study more deeply the history of the peoples who lived in this region.

Conclusion

In conclusion, written sources, archaeological materials, epigraphic evidence, and historical chronicles play an important role in studying the ancient and early medieval history of Central Asia. Through the study of these sources, it is possible to obtain valuable information about the customs, economic life, geographical location, and political as well as cultural relations of ancient peoples with neighboring states. Furthermore, the study of historical sources contributes not only to historical research but also to related fields such as archaeology and ethnology, allowing us to explore our past more deeply and comprehensively. In particular, one of the important tasks of modern historical scholarship is to search for manuscript sources preserved in libraries and archives around the world, translate them, and conduct scholarly research based on them. This process makes it possible to reveal aspects of Central Asian history that have not yet been fully studied and to carry out new scientific investigations.

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